

July 30, 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

From: Joe Barger
NEPA Coordinator
National Institute of Standards and Technology

Subject: **Finding of No Significant Impact**

Project: Robotics and Autonomous Systems Laboratory for Coastal Conservation
and Restoration

Location: Florida International University, Biscayne Bay Campus
3000 NE 151st Street, North Miami, FL 33181

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and associated implementing regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) require that all major federal actions be reviewed with respect to their environmental consequences. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is providing a congressionally directed funding grant for the construction of the Robotics and Autonomous Systems Laboratory for Coastal Conservation and Restoration (RASCAR) on the Biscayne Bay Campus of Florida International University (FIU). Consequently, NEPA and the associated implementing regulations apply to this project.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared by the grant recipient (FIU) for this project and provided for public review. The EA (Environmental Assessment of the Robotics and Autonomous Systems Laboratory for Coastal Conservation and Restoration at the Florida International University at Biscayne Bay Campus, July 2025, Miller Legg) is incorporated by reference. This memorandum summarizes the impacts identified and the mitigation proposed in the EA and documents a finding of no significant environmental impact (FONSI) for the construction and operation of the FIU RASCAR Building.

Description of the Action

The purpose of this project is to design, build and operate the new RASCAR Building to enhance FIU's technological abilities and approaches to coastal ecosystem monitoring,

restoration and conservation. The project includes the construction of a new 6,000 square foot multi-use, multi-purpose building. The building will house offices and laboratories for faculty and students associated with this initiative, manufacturing space to construct large-scale autonomous vehicles, and a space for testing capabilities such as a hydrostatic tank to determine pressure tolerances. Non-building equipment to be installed includes computer stations; 3D printers and cutters; multi-beam sonar systems, acoustic communications, underwater lighting and hydrophones.

The proposed site for the RASCAR Building is currently an undeveloped portion of the FIU Biscayne Bay Campus (open grassy area) under the property appraiser address of 14301 Bay Vista Blvd or 15000 Biscayne Blvd. To the immediate north of the proposed property is an existing parking lot; to the east is an Ecotoxicology Laboratory; to the south is an existing practice soccer field; and to the west are existing dormitories. The site is owned by the State of Florida Department of Natural Resources with FIU as the long-term lessee (until January 21, 2073) as a mutual covenant for developing, improving, operating, maintaining and managing the lands for public purpose.

The EA for this project identifies the environmental impacts of the proposed action, as well as measures to mitigate impacts.

Impacts and Mitigation

This FONSI is predicated on the implementation of the mitigation measures discussed below:

Aesthetics and Visual Resources

The RASCAR building will be a multi-story structure similar in height and design of surrounding buildings on the campus while providing a more modern aesthetic that is visually sinuous with the campus. This building will be a small structure in relation to the larger campus facilities nearby. The first floor is an elevated open-air pillar structure to accommodate the potential for storm and flooding events.

Air Quality

Due to energy use from the proposed building, primarily lighting and cooling, air pollutants will be emitted. Energy conservation measures are proposed to mitigate the amounts of air pollutants released. The building will be designed to United States Green Building Council (USGBC)'s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification standards.

Cultural Resources

Review of the National register of Historic Places indicates the project site is not located in a historic district nor are there designated historic or cultural resources identified on site. Separately, a formal request for review of the project was submitted with the Florida Division of

Historic Resources whereby an unlikely to affect historical properties determination was provided. Suggested special condition language was provided and will be made part of the Construction Documents. The Special condition is as follows:

“If prehistoric or historic artifacts, such as pottery or ceramics, projectile points, dugout canoes, metal implements, historic building materials, or any other physical remains that could be associated with Native American, early European or American settlement are encountered at any time within the project area, the permitted project shall cease all activities involving subsurface disturbance in the vicinity of the discovery. The applicant shall contact the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Compliance Review Section at (850) 245-6333. Project activities shall not resume without verbal and/or written authorization. In the event human remains are encountered during permitted activities, all work shall stop immediately and proper authorities notified in accordance with Section 872.05, Florida Statutes.”

Noise

Construction activities such as pile driving, will temporarily increase ambient noise levels, however construction will be limited to daylight weekday hours, and the latest technologies such as noise barriers will be utilized as much as possible in order to reduce noise levels.

Public Health and Occupational Safety

All hazardous materials used at the new RASCAR Building will be properly handled and disposed in accordance with the existing FIU Chemical Hygiene Plan.

Stormwater

Best Management Practices will be implemented to limit stormwater runoff and erosion from the project construction site, such as placement of a silt fence around the site and contained design of infrastructure to protect the nearby wetland habitat.

Surface Water and Flooding

The proposed RASCAR Building will be located within a special flood hazard area, Zone AE with an elevation of 9-feet. The entire Biscayne Bay Campus is within this flood zone and therefore, existing flood insurance and hardening protocols are in place. The proposed building will be built on piles, and therefore the first floor will be uninhabited. The building envelope will be entirely on the second floor which is anticipated to be at an elevation of 20-22' to mitigate current and projected future flood hazards.

Conclusion

NIST hereby adopts the EA prepared by the applicant for the proposed action described above. After reviewing the assessment and the supporting materials provided by the grant recipient, NIST finds that the EA properly documents the project's environmental impact.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500 through 1508), NIST has determined that, with the mitigation measures described above, the proposed action will have no significant adverse impact on the quality of the human environment. As a result of this FONSI, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

Approvals:

Joe Barger
NIST NEPA Coordinator

7/31/2025

Date

Andrew Wright
NIST Chief Facilities Management Officer

Date